

## **Out of Tragedy Comes Love**

By: Lee Ann Bennett, Clerk of Court

On June 12, 2016, tragedy hit Orlando and the nation when a gunman killed 49 people and injured 53 others inside the Pulse nightclub. The deadliest act of violence since September 11, 2001, happened in our community. Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer stated, “We will be defined by how we respond, how we treat each other.” Oh how we have responded! From numerous vigils, not only in Orlando, but in cities across the nation and in other countries, to blood drives, interfaith services, and several memorials. Many of our court staff attended the vigils and participated in other events to support the victims and our community.



In addition, fund drives (GoFundMe and OneOrlando) have raised millions of dollars for the victims, a record for GoFundMe. Love and support have been overwhelming in this city we love. It was so fitting that a beautiful rainbow appeared over the city during a vigil attended by 50,000 people held at Lake Eola.



Photo credit @Tweags

Last Saturday, during a run through my neighborhood, I was struck by the number of signs placed in my neighbors' yards. Some homemade signs, some purchased. The messages on the signs reflect how this community in the Middle District of Florida responded – “Orlando Strong,” “Orlando One City, One Heart,” “Orlando Love Wins,” “Orlando United, We Stand Together As One Community.” The signs were in the yards of the elderly, in the yards of the young, in the yards of the single and the married, and in the yards of those with children and teenagers. I couldn't help but choke up while seeing how our community has responded. I have never been prouder that my Court is located in the city that stands united. Orlando is called “The City Beautiful,” and the response to the tragedy truly demonstrates how fitting that title is. Words in our mission statement also came to mind: “treat everyone with dignity, integrity, and respect.” May we always live by those words, may we always stand united, may we always love.

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**Love Wins**  
**Orlando United, We Stand Together As One Community**  
**One Court, One Team.**